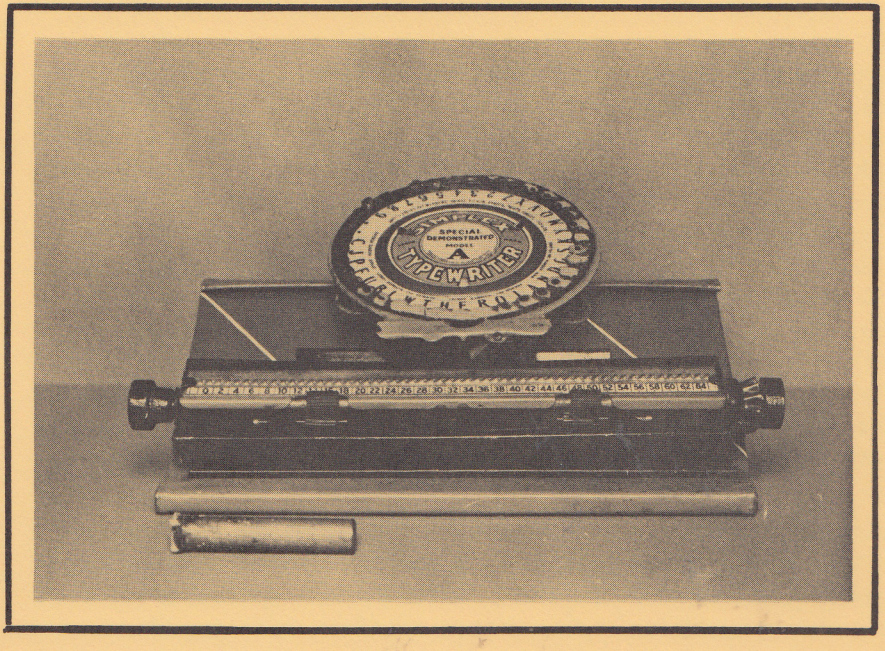
"They teach . . . They entertain"

A Pictorial Collection of Simplex Typewriters from the Early Twentieth Century



Darryl E. Matter
Roxana Marie Matter

SIMPLEX TYPEWRITERS

Children's typewriters have delighted both boys and girls since they first became available about the turn-of-the-century. As realistic and workable miniatures of adult typewriters, children's typewriters not only have entertained children but have enabled them to learn a useful skill. **Simplex** summarizes the dual function of children's typewriters by advertising *"They teach . . . They entertain."*

A Brief History of the Typewriter

Peter Merrill reports in **The Encyclopedia Americana** that Henry Mill, a London engineer, patented the first typewriter on January 7, 1714 (p. 320). There are no records to indicate whether this typewriter was actually constructed, but it appears that the idea of a typewriter has existed for well over 200 years. Patrick Robinson notes in **The Book of Firsts** that Pellegrine Turri of Reggio Emilia, Italy, built the "first typewriter of practical utility" in 1808 for his blind friend, the Countess Carolina Fatoni (p. 193).

Many other inventors were involved in the early development of the typewriter. Among them were William Austin Burt, to whom the "first patent of consequence was issued by the United States Patent office in 1829"; Xavier Projean of Marseille, who "patented a machine with the first manual keyboard" in 1833; Charles Thurber of Worchester, Massachusetts, who patented a "printing machine" in 1843; John B. Fairbank, who "was granted a patent in 1850 for . . . the first typewriter with a continuous-roll paper feed"; and Christopher Latham Sholes, to whom "the most famous early patent" was issued in 1868. James Densmore promoted an improved version of the Sholes typewriter in 1872. In 1873, Densmore negotiated a contract with Philo Remington of Ilion, New York, to manufacture typewriters. The first Remington typewriter appeared on the market in 1874. It was the first machine to feature "the modern standard arrangement of keyboard characters" (Peter Merrill, **The Encyclopedia Americana,** Vol. 27, pp. 320-322).

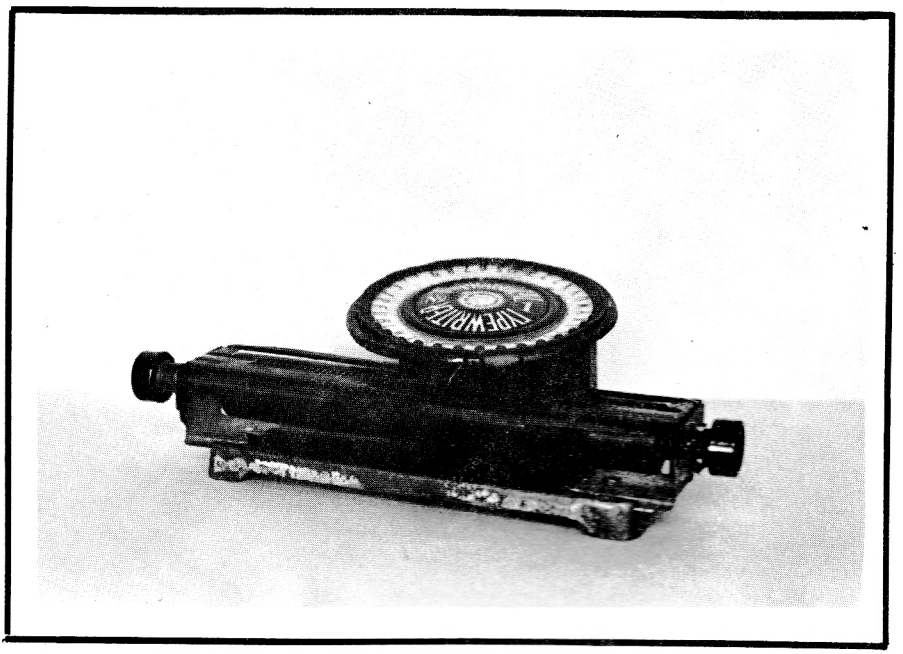
The typewriter has proven to be an invaluable aid to adults for business purposes and for personal correspondence. Indeed, as expressed in 1923 in **The Story of the Typewriter 1873-1923**, published by the Herkimer County Historical Society (New York), the typewriter "has freed the world from pen slavery and, in doing so, it has saved a volume of time and labor which is simply incalculable. Its time saving service has facilitated and rendered possible the enormous growth of modern business" (p. 9).

Typewriters for Children

Small typewriters became available about the turn-of-the-century. Sometimes it is difficult to determine if they were intended for children or adults. It appears likely that the small machines were used by adults and gradually became popular educational toys for children. By the 1920s, children's typewriters were available in a variety of styles by various manufacturers. They were advertised in popular magazines and occasionally offered as premiums for selling subscriptions to magazines.

The **Simplex Typewriter Company** produced a wide variety of small typewriters from the turn-of-the-century into the 1930s. While the earlier ones likely served adults as well as children, those produced in the 1920s and 1930s appear to have been designed specifically for children. The company slogan, "They teach . . . They entertain," found on later packing boxes, suggests and promotes both the educational as well as the entertainment value of the **Simplex** typewriters. A number of **Simplex** typewriters from the authors' personal collection are featured in this publication.

Most **Simplex** typewriters carry a model number or designation on the dial. The typewriters discussed in this article are listed according to their respective model numbers or designations.



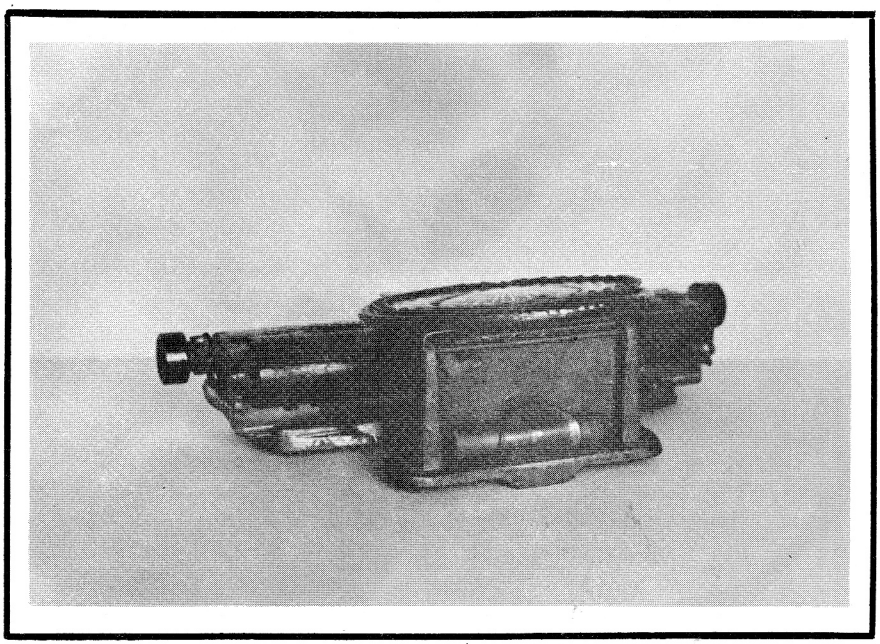
Photograph Number 1. ***The Practical Typewriter No. 1*** **manufacuted by the Simplex Typewriter Company.**

The Practical Typewriter No. 1

Photograph Number 1 features **The Practical Typewriter No. 1,** manufactured by the Simplex Typewriter Co., 644 First Ave., New York, as noted on the machine. This typewriter was produced in the early 1900s. Made of sturdy cast steel, it is painted in red, black, and cream colors. It is approximately nine inches long. The round type plate is mounted at close to a forty-five degree angle and contains steel type. There are two ink-pad holders.

All capital letters, all figures, a period, and a comma may be typed. Letters and characters are grouped "CJPFUBLWTHEROIANDGSKYMQVXZ 23456789,." on the type wheel. Note that letters used to spell common words such as **the, their, there, and,** and **sky** are grouped together. It appears evident that considerable thought was given to the type wheel layout.

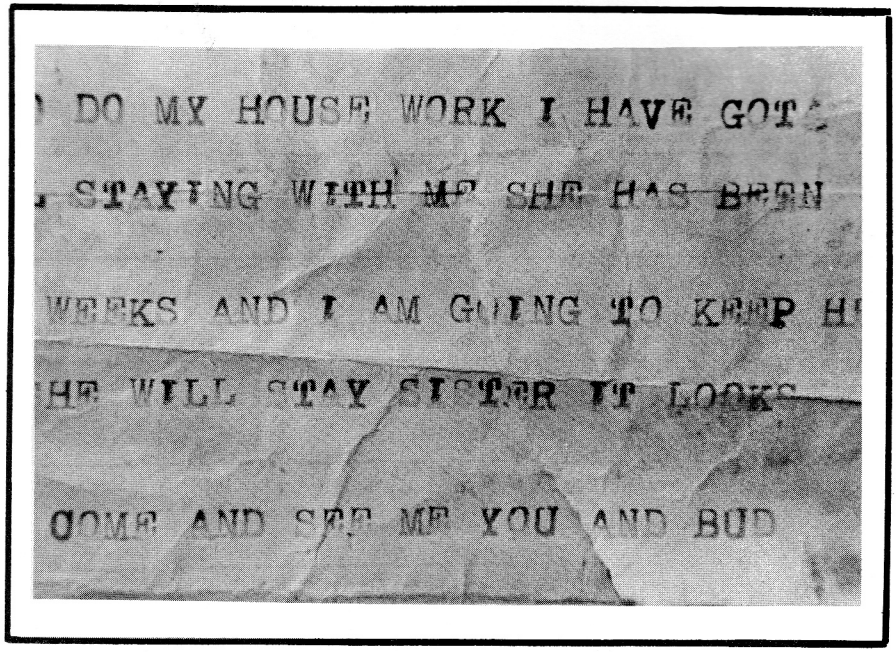
The reverse side of **The Practical Typewriter No. 1** is shown in Photograph Number 2. Note the sturdy construction and the vial which originally held ink for the machine.



Photograph Number 2. Reverse side of *The Practical Typewriter No. 1* shown in Photograph Number 1. Note the vial which held typewriter ink.

Accompanying this typewriter is a full-page letter written on the machine shown in photographs Number 1 and Number 2 and dated 1915. Written by an adult, the letter indicates the quality of type that the machine produced

when new. The letters are spaced well, and the ink is only a little faded with the years. This typewriter would have been slow to operate, of course, requiring that the type wheel be turned for each new letter printed. A portion of the 1915 letter is reproduced in Photograph Number 3.

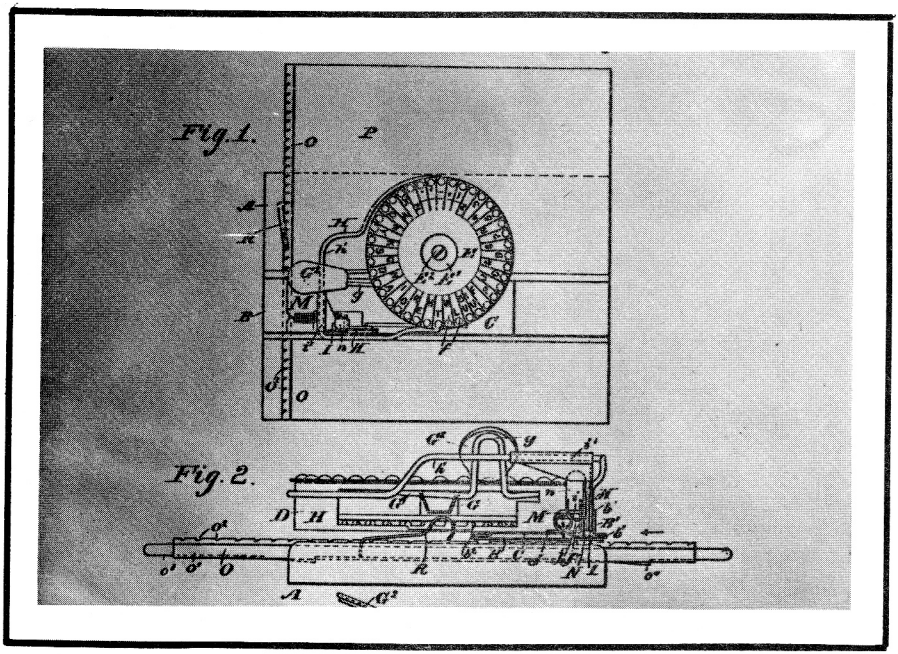

DO MY HOUSE WORK I HAVE GOT
STAYING WITH ME SHE HAS BEEN
WEEKS AND I AM GOING TO KEEP H
HE WILL STAY STEER IT LOOKS
COME AND SEE ME YOU AND BUD

Photograph Number 3. A portion of a letter dated 1915 and typed on *The Practial Typewriter No. 1* shown in Photographs Number 1 and 2.

United States patent dates of August 30, 1892; March 21, 1899; and March 25, 1902, are listed on the typewriter dial along with various British, German, and French patent numbers. The United States patent dates refer to patent number 481,855 (issued Aug. 30, 1892), number 621,628 (issued Mar. 21, 1899), and number 696,304 (issued Mar. 25, 1902). These patents are described in the following paragraphs.

United States patent number 481,855 was issued to Alando M. English on August 30, 1892. As stated in the patent specifications, "the object of the invention is to provide a new and improved type-writer simple and economical in construction and effective in operation, the invention being distinguished by a novel and reliable feed mechanism for word spacing, a novel line spacing attachment, and improved details. . ." (lines 7 through 13). Figures one and two from the patent drawings are reproduced in Photograph

Number 4. A plan view and side view of the typewriter are shown. Other patent drawings, not reproduced here, show additional details of construction. As noted in the patent, it was assigned to Philip Becker.

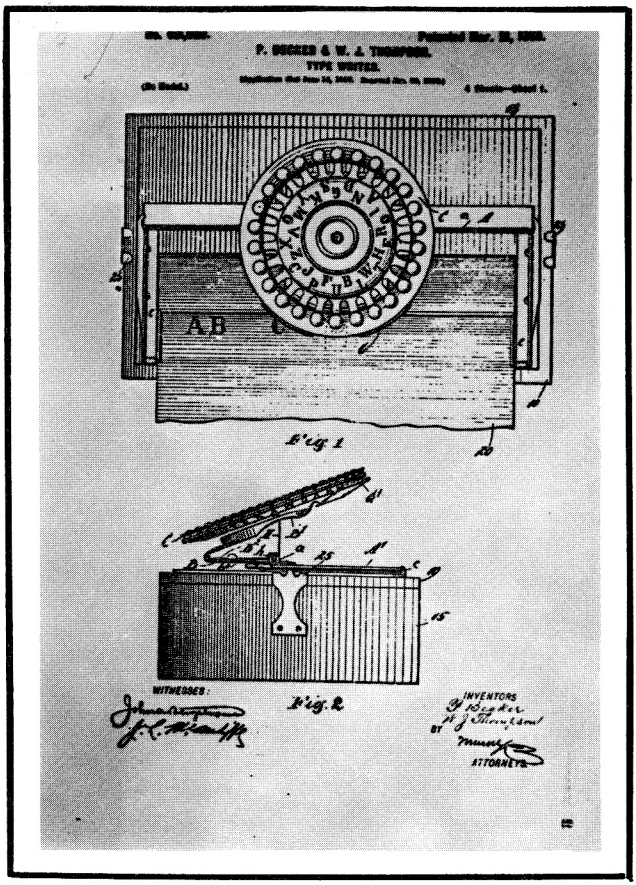


Photograph Number 4. Figures number one and two from United States patent number 481,855 issued to A. M. English for a "Type Writing Machine" on Aug. 30, 1892.

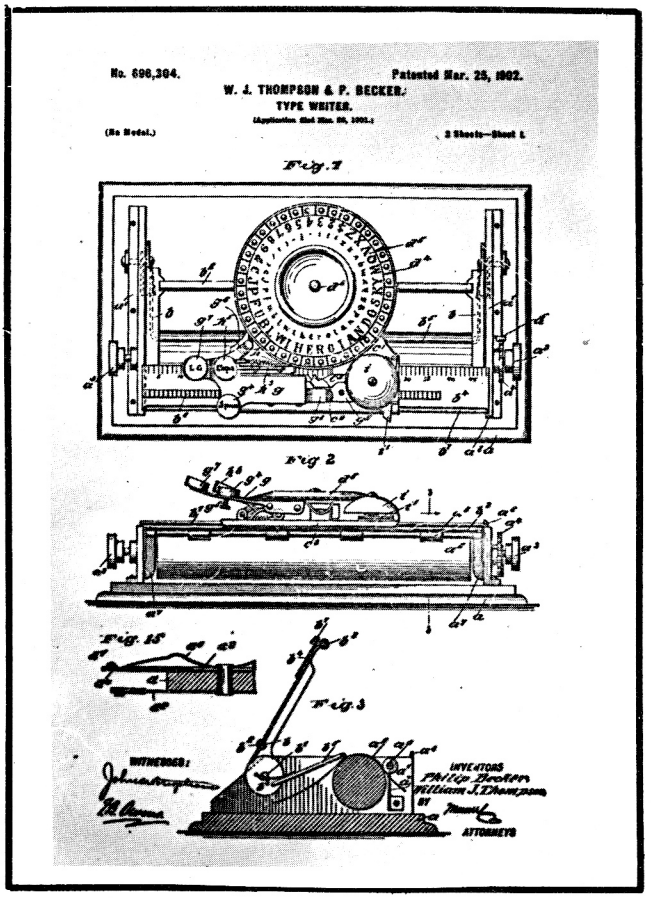
On March 21, 1899, United States patent number 621,628 for a "new and improved typewriter" was issued to Philip Becker and William J. Thompson. "The object of the invention is to provide a type-writer of very simple construction and capable of a comparatively wide range of work" (patent specifications, lines 9 through 12). Drawing details from this patent are reproduced in Photograph Number 5.

Several details from United States patent number 696,304, issued to William J. Thompson and Philip Becker on March 25, 1902, are reproduced in Photograph Number 6. "This invention relates to a type-writer which in its preferred form embodies a flexible type-form mounted for rotary movement to locate the type for impression and arranged with certain peculiar devices for flexing the type to effect impressions. spacing the characters impressed,

and effecting certain other results necessary to and advantageous in the operation of the machine" (patent specifications, lines 9 through 17).

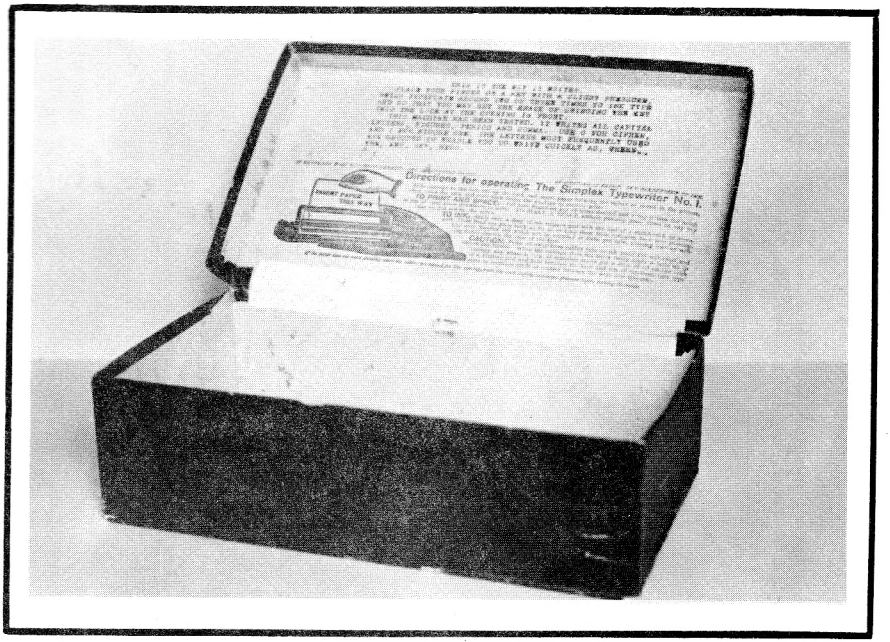


Photograph Number 5. Patent drawing from United States patent number 621,628 issued to P. Becker and W. J. Thompson for a "Type Writer" on Mar. 21, 1899.

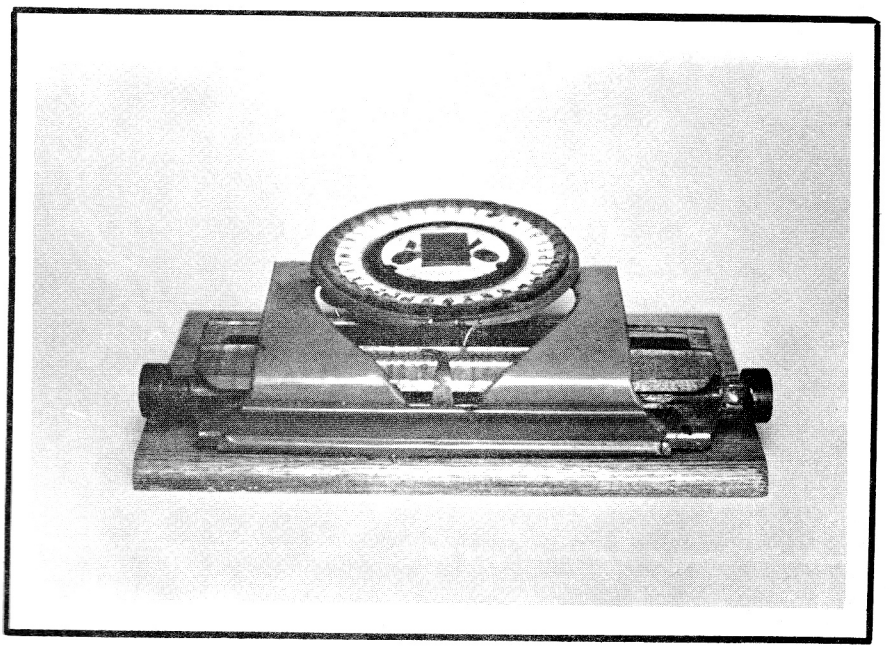


Photograph Number 6. Patent drawings from United States patent number 696,304 issued to W. J. Thompson and P. Becker for a "Typewriter" on Mar. 25, 1902.

The original box for **The Practical Typewriter No. 1** is shown in Photograph Number 7. It is made of cloth-covered fiberboard and the instructions for operating the typewriter are printed both in the box lid and on the inside bottom of the box.



Photograph Number 7. Original packing box for *The Practical Typewriter No. 1* shown in Photographs Number 1 and 2.

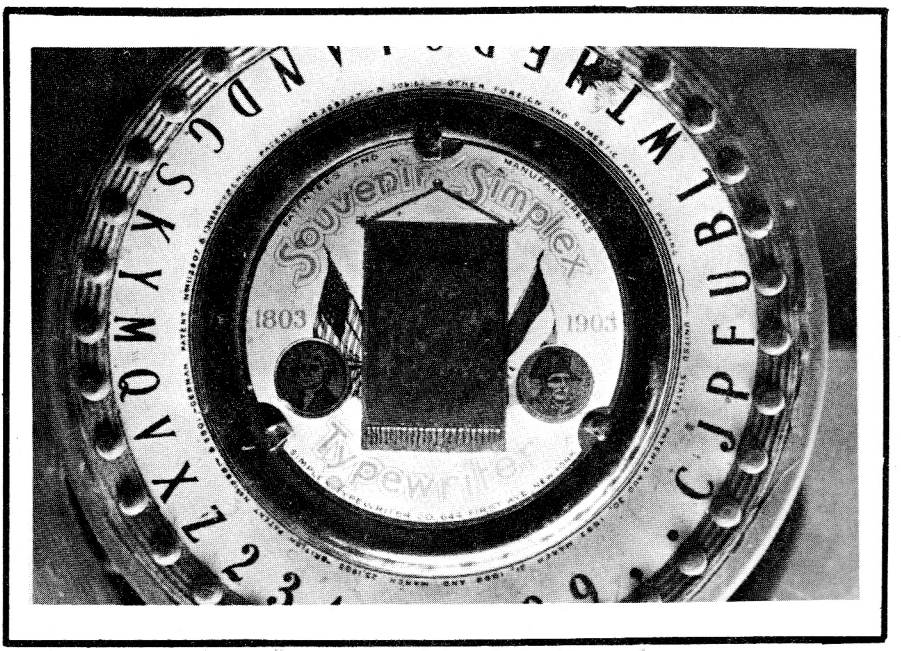


Photograph Number 8. The *Souvenir Simplex* typewriter.

The Souvenir Simplex Typewriter

The **Souvenir Simplex** typewriter, shown in Photograph Number 8, was apparently designed to commemorate the Louisiana Purchase. The typewriter dial features both United States and French flags along with pictures of two men, probably Thomas Jefferson and Napoleon. The dates 1803 and 1903 appear on the dial as does the slogan "Simple and Efficient Writing Machine." A close-up of the dial is shown in Photograph Number 9.

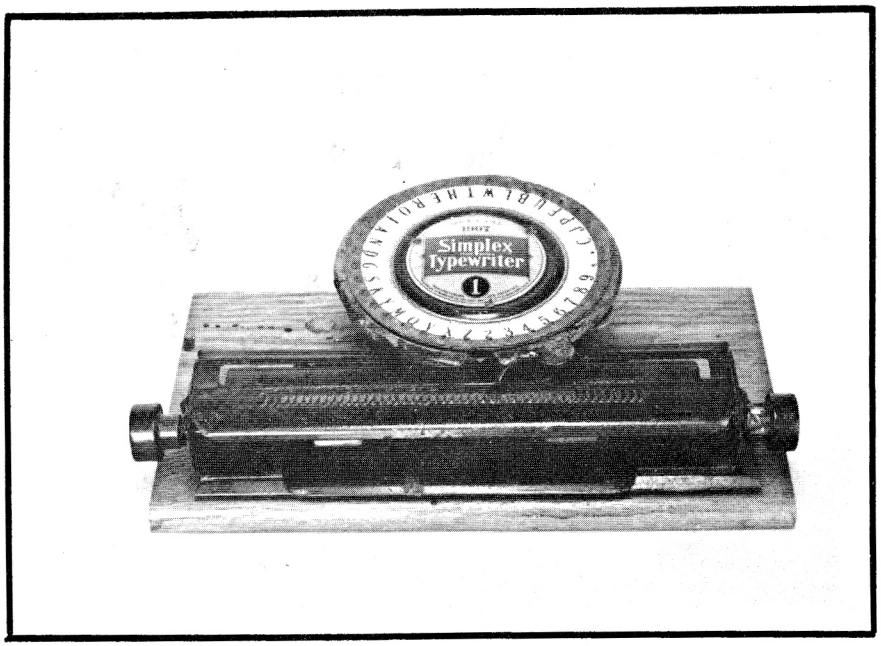
The dial is painted a cream color with red and blue trim. Metal parts of the typewriter are painted red and are galvanized. The base of the typewriter is made of hardwood and is nicely finished. Note that the letters on the typewriter dial are arranged in a manner similar to those on **The Practical Typewriter No. 1** featured previously.



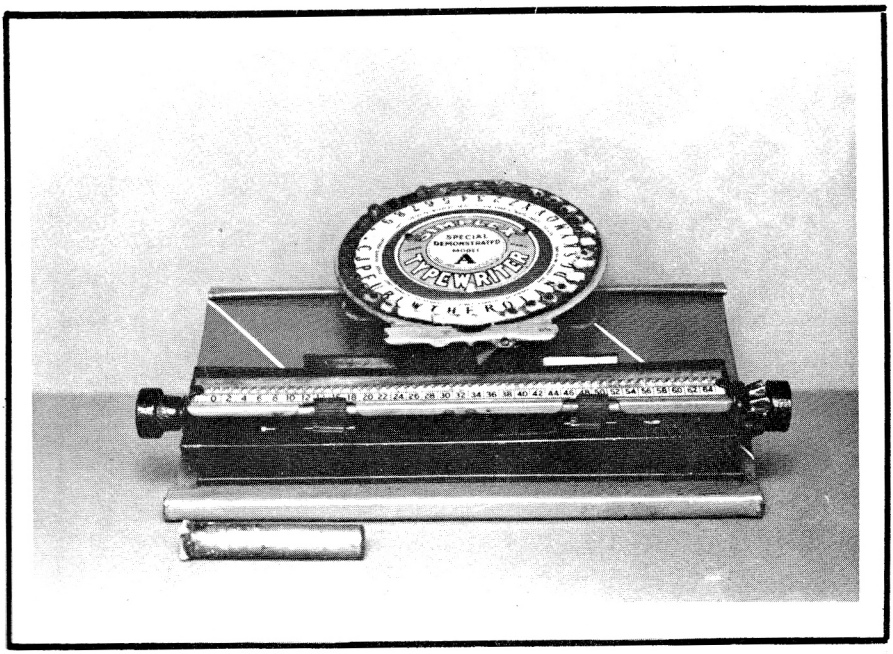
Photograph Number 9. A close-up of the dial on the *Souvenir Simplex* typewriter shown in Photograph Number 8.

United States patent dates are included on the dial as are British, German, and French patent numbers. Patent numbers are the same ones found on **The Practical Typewriter No. 1.**

The original cloth-covered fiberboard packing box for the **Souvenir Simplex** typewriter is not shown. It is similar to the packing box shown in Photograph Number 7 which accompanied **The Practical Typewriter No. 1.** Instructions for the use of the typewriter are printed on the cover of the box.



Photograph Number 10. The *Special 1907 Simplex Typewriter "1."*



Photograph Number 11. *The Simplex Typewriter Model A.*

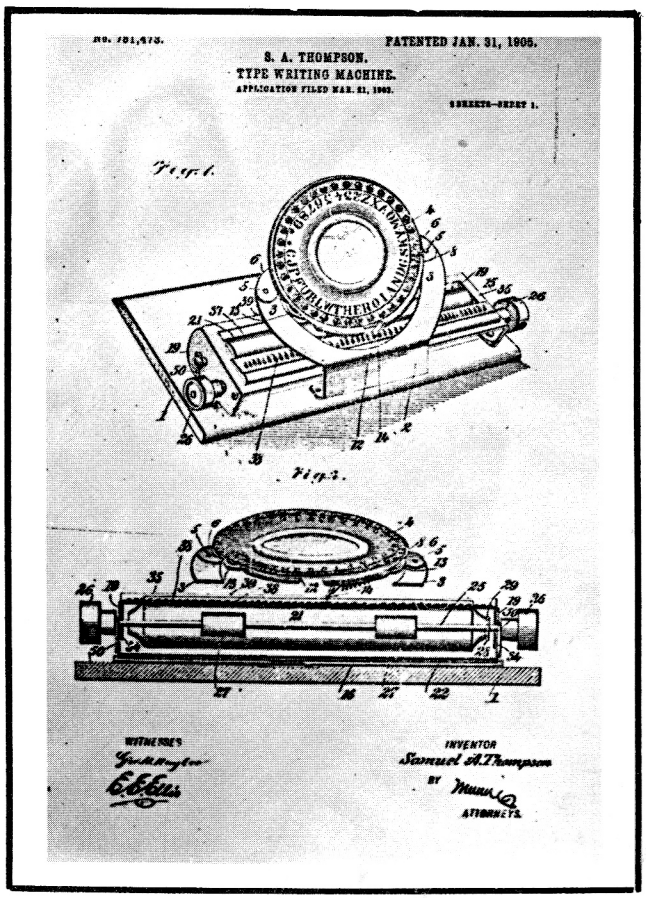
The Special 1907 Simplex Typewriter "1"

Photograph Number 10 features a **Special 1907 Simplex Typewriter "1."** The mechanism is mounted on a nicely finished wood base and painted black. Its type wheel is finished in cream, red, green, and black.

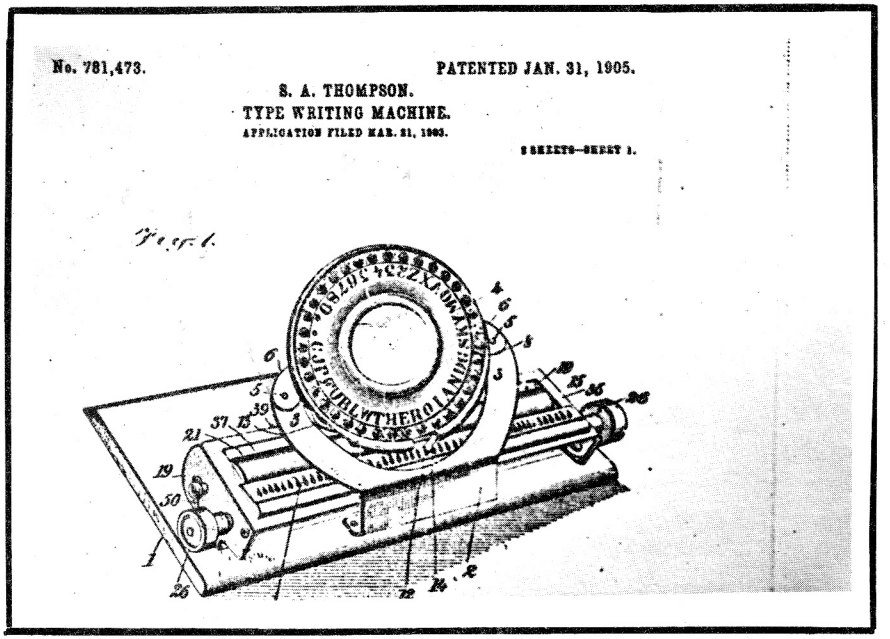
This typewriter dial is marked "Manufacturers and Patentees, Simplex Typewriter Co., Cor. First Ave. and 37th St., New York, U.S.A." United States patent dates are listed as are foreign patent numbers. The patent information is the same as on the previously described typewriters.

Simplex Typewriter Model A

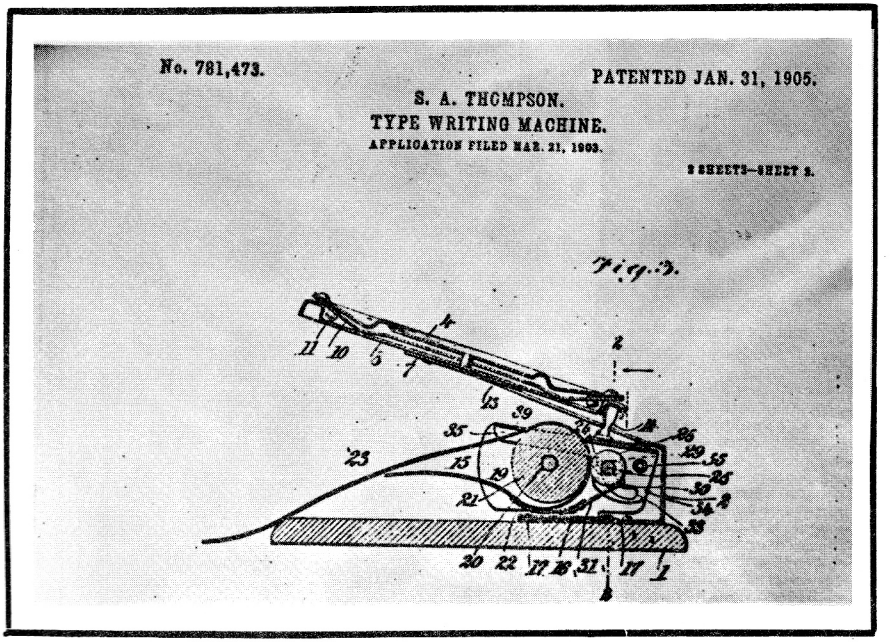
Photograph Number 11 shows a **Simplex Typewriter Model A,** manufactured by the Simplex Typewriter Co., 210 Eleventh Ave., New York, and so marked. It is similar in overall size to **The Practical Typewriter No. 1.**



Photograph Number 12. Patent drawings from United States patent number 781,473 issued to S. A. Thompson for a "Type Writing Machine" on Jan. 31, 1905.



Photograph Number 13. An enlargement of Figure 1 from United States patent number 781,473.

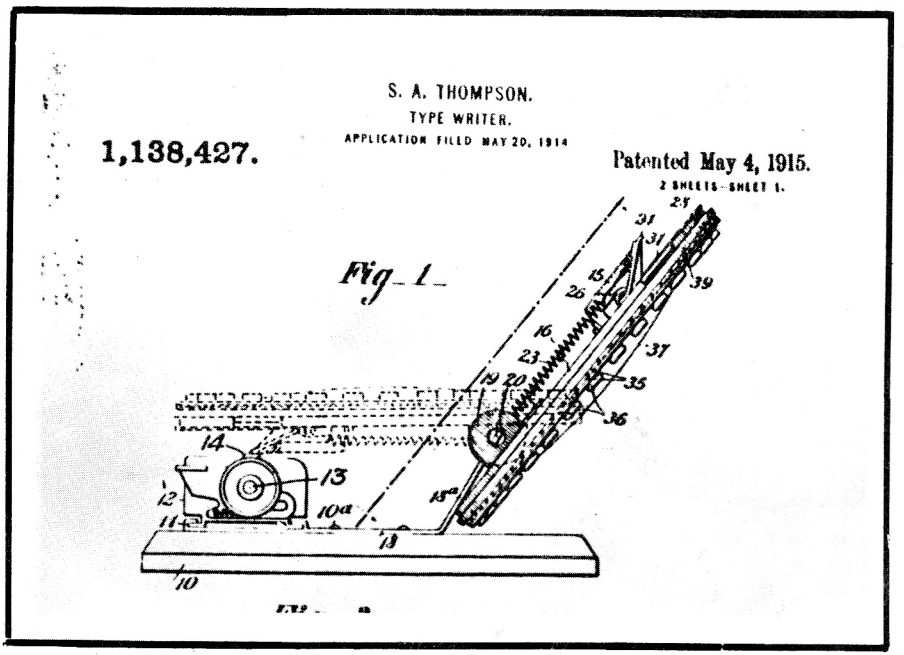


Photograph Number 14. Patent drawings from United States patent number 781,473.

the **Souvenir Simplex,** and the **Special 1907 Simplex Typewriter "1."** A somewhat improved paper holder and numbered space bar are incorporated into the design of this machine. The **Simplex Typewriter Model A** is painted red, blue, black, and cream colors.

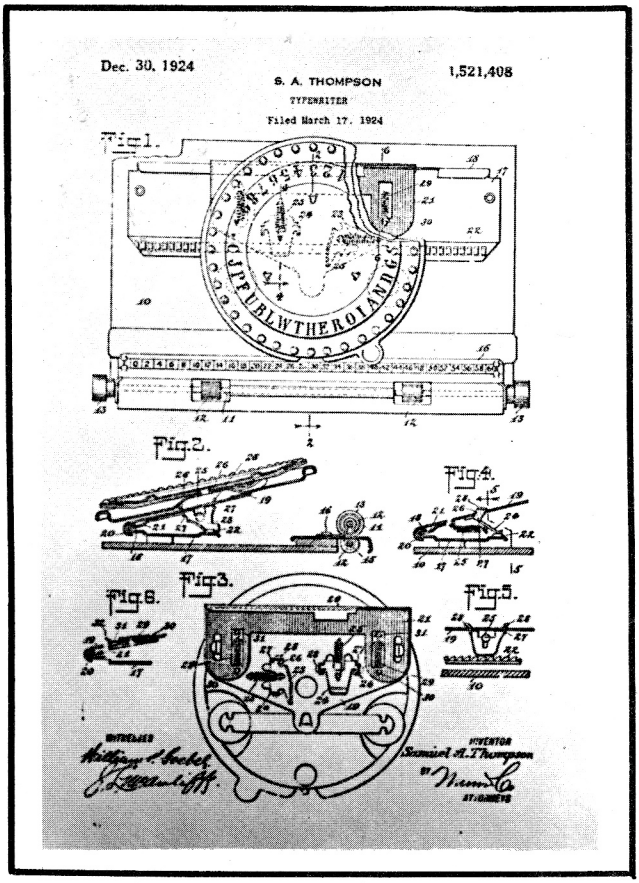
United States patent numbers 481,855; 621,628; 696,304; 781,473; 1,138,427; and 1,521,408 are listed on the **Simplex Typewriter Model A** dial along with several foreign patents. The first three numbers are the same as those on **The Practical Typewriter No. 1** and the **Souvenir Simplex** discussed previously. United States patent number 781,473 was issued to Samuel A. Thompson on January 31, 1905. Drawings from this patent are reproduced in Photographs Number 12, 13, and 14. (Photograph Number 13 is an enlargement of Figure 1 from Photograph Number 12.)

The other United States patents listed on the **Simplex Typewriter Model A** were also issued to Samuel A. Thompson. Number 1,138,427 was issued on May 4, 1915, and number 1,521,408 on December 30, 1924. Both of these patents dealt with improvements in the **Simplex** typewriter. The first of these two patents dealt with improvements to the type wheel and some other minor features while the second cited improvements in the carriage and feed



Photograph Number 15. Patent drawings from United States patent number 1,138,427 issued to S. A. Thompson for a "Type Writer" on May 4, 1915.

mechanisms. A detail from Patent Number 1,138,427 is reproduced in Photograph No. 15. Drawings from Patent Number 1,521,408 are reproduced in Photograph Number 16.

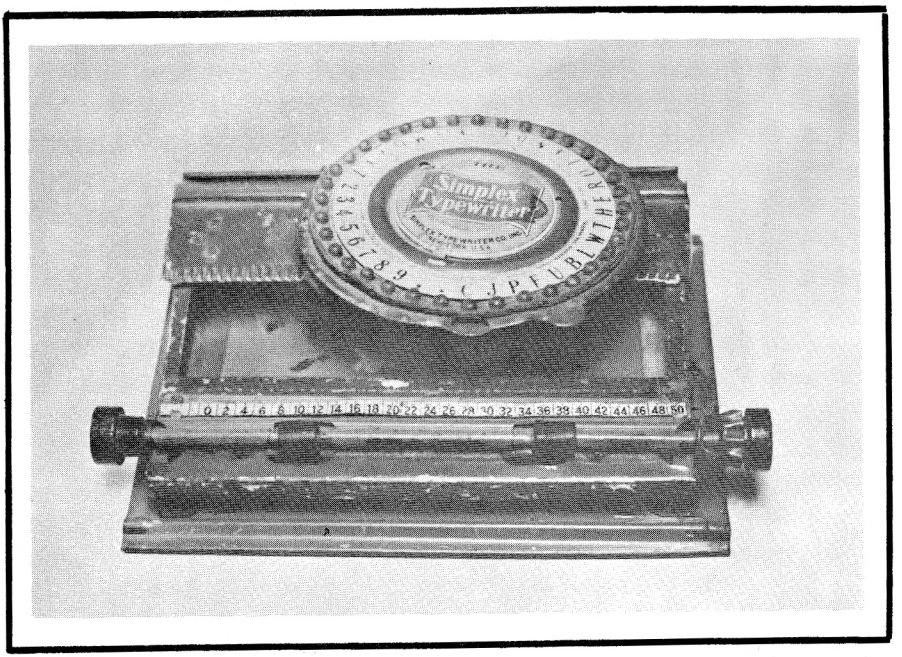


Photograph Number 16. Patent drawings from United States patent number 1,521,408 issued to S. A. Thompson for a "Type Writer" on Dec. 1924.

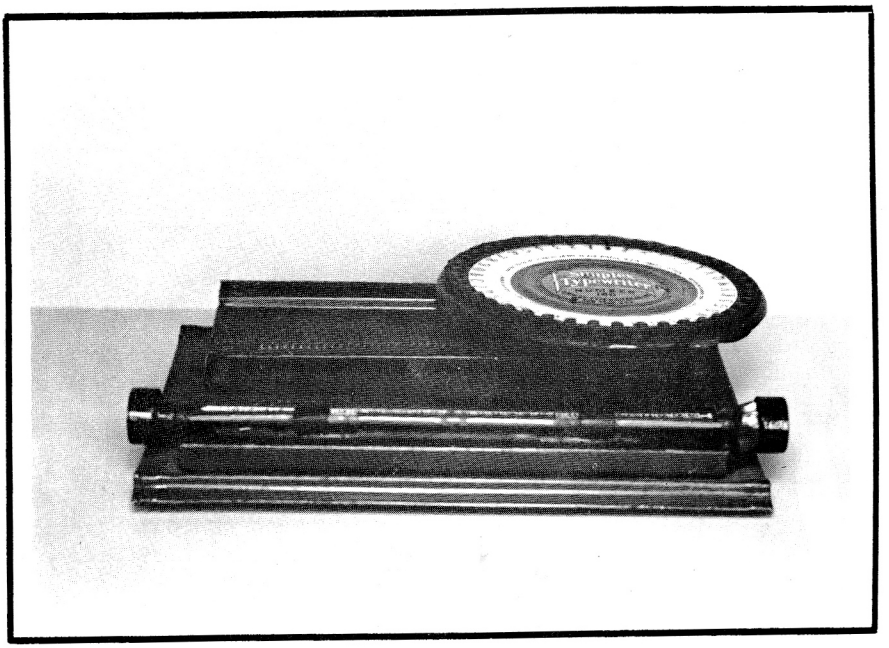
The Simplex Typewriter

Photograph Number 17 features a small **Simplex Typewriter**. It is approximately 6½ inches wide and would have accepted paper about 5½ inches in width. This typewriter was nicely finished in red, green, cream, and black enamel.

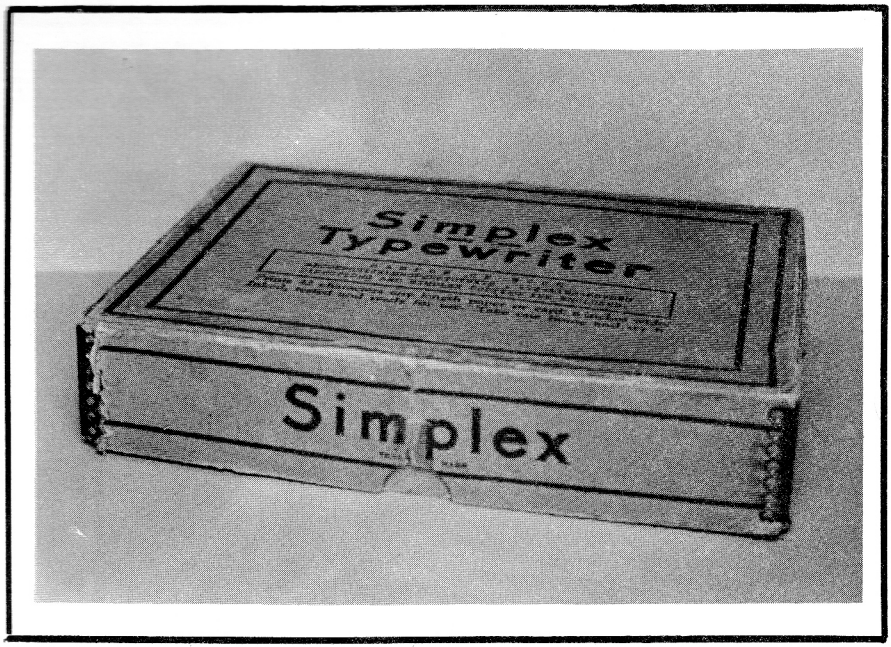
The dial lists the same patent information as the **Simplex Typewriter Model A**. The Simplex Typewriter Company address in noted simply as New York, U.S.A. Note that the characters on the type wheel are arranged in the same manner as those on **The Practical Typewriter No. 1** described previously.



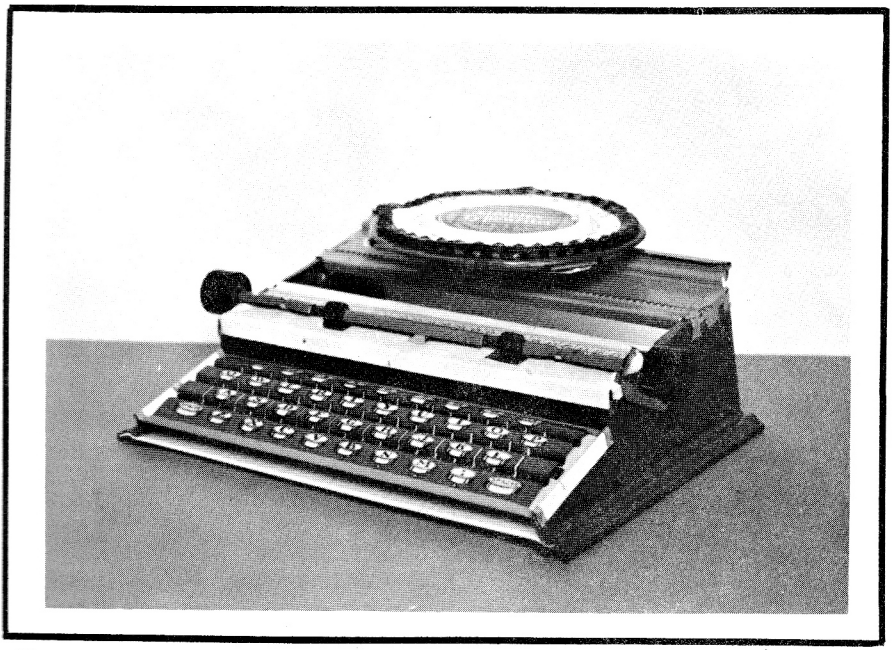
Photograph Number 17. Small *Simplex Typewriter.*



Photograph Number 18. The *Simplex Typewriter Number 160.*



Photograph Number 19. Original packing box for the *Simplex Typewriter Number 160* shown in **Photograph Number 18.**



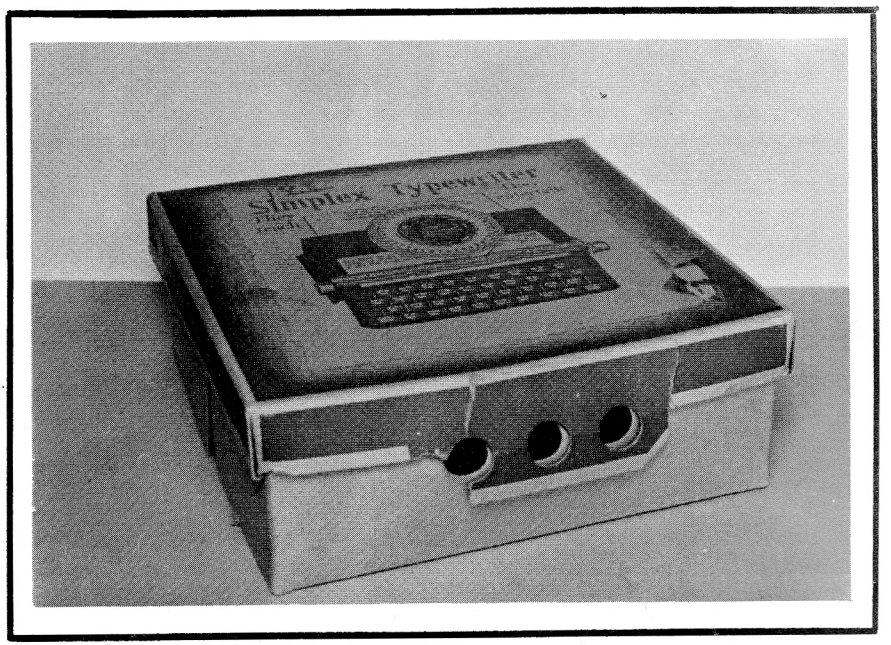
Photograph Number 20. The *Simplex Typewriter Number 200.*

Simplex Typewriter Number 160

A **Simplex Typewriter Number 160** is shown in Photograph Number 18. It is similar in construction and finish to the small **Simplex** typewriter featured in Photograph Number 17. The **Number 160**, however, is longer and therefore able to accept wider paper. Also, the construction of the **Number 160** results in a sturdier typewriter. The packing box for the **Simplex Typewriter Number 160** is shown in Photograph Number 19.

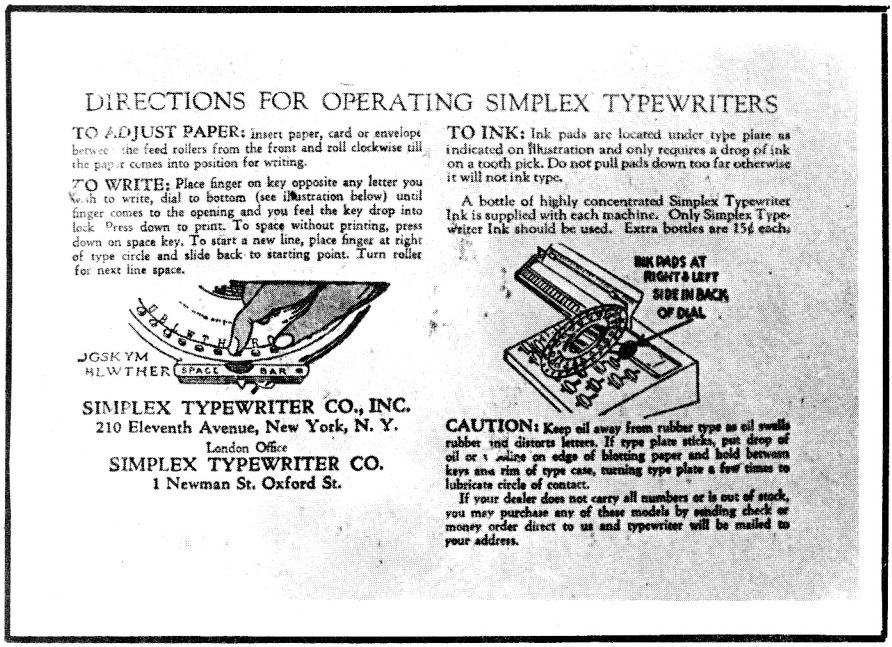
Simplex Typewriter Number 200

Photograph Number 20 features a **Simplex Typewriter Number 200.** This machine uses a dial type wheel and mechanism similar to the **Simplex** typewriters described previously. The base of the **Number 200** is quite different, however, in that a simulated keyboard is employed. The **Simplex Typewriter Number 200** is finished in light green, red, cream, and black enamel.



Photograph Number 21. Original packing box for the *Simplex Typewriter Number 200* shown in Photograph Number 20.

The packing box for the **Number 200** is shown in Photograph Number 21. An apparent original price of $1.98 is handwritten on the lid. Directions for operating the typewriter are printed in the box lid and reproduced in Photograph Number 22. The box lid is imprinted with both a New York and a London address for the Simplex Typewriter Company.

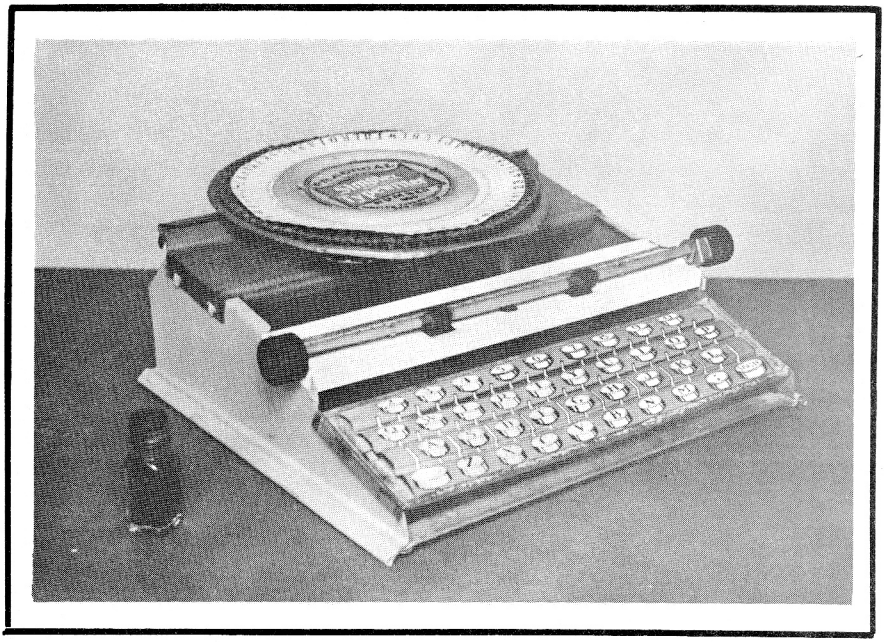

DIRECTIONS FOR OPERATING SIMPLEX TYPEWRITERS
TO ADJUST PAPER: Insert paper, card or envelope between the feed rollers from the front and roll clockwise till the paper comes into position for writing.
TO WRITE: Place finger on key opposite any letter you wish to write, dial to bottom (see illustration below) until finger comes to the opening and you feel the key drop into lock. Press down to print. To space without printing, press down on space key. To start a new line, place finger at right of type circle and slide back to starting point. Turn roller for next line space.
JGSKYM
BLWTHER
SPACE BAR
SIMPLEX TYPEWRITER CO., INC.
210 Eleventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.
London Office
SIMPLEX TYPEWRITER CO.
1 Newman St. Oxford St.
TO INK: Ink pads are located under type plate as indicated on illustration and only requires a drop of ink on a tooth pick. Do not pull pads down too far otherwise it will not ink type.
A bottle of highly concentrated Simplex Typewriter Ink is supplied with each machine. Only Simplex Typewriter Ink should be used. Extra bottles are 15¢ each.
INK PADS AT RIGHT & LEFT SIDE IN BACK OF DIAL
CAUTION: Keep oil away from rubber type as oil swells rubber and distorts letters. If type plate sticks, put drop of oil or vaseline on edge of blotting paper and hold between keys and rim of type case, turning type plate a few times to lubricate circle of contact.
If your dealer does not carry all numbers or is out of stock, you may purchase any of these models by sending check or money order direct to us and typewriter will be mailed to your address.

Photograph Number 22. Instructions for operating the *Simplex Typewriter Number 200* as imprinted in the packing box lid.

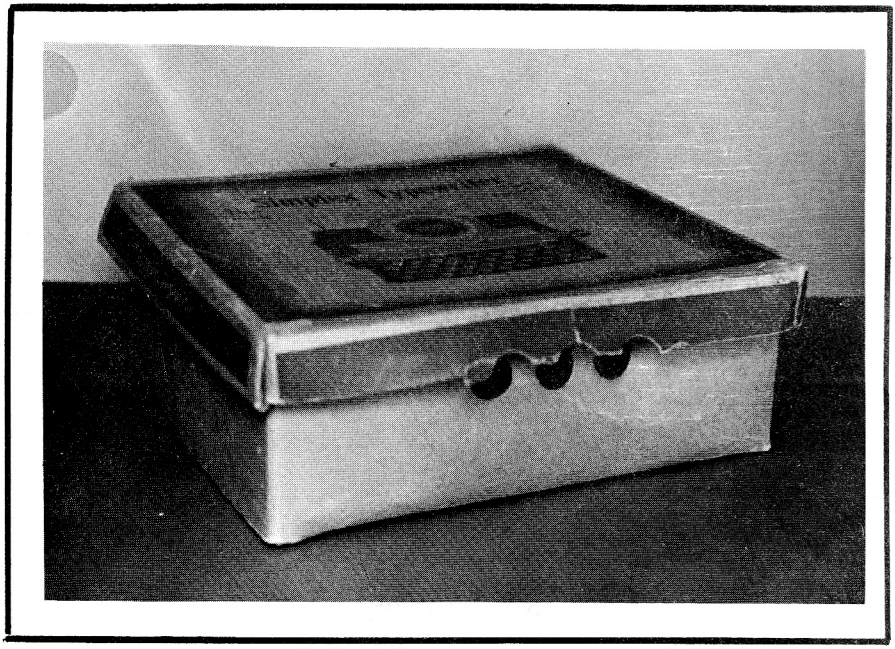
The Practical Simplex Typewriter Number 300

The Practical Simplex Typewriter Number 300, shown in Photograph Number 23, is similar to the **Simplex Typewriter Number 200** in construction and finish. There are, however, several major differences. The **Number 300** is quite a large machine by comparison. Also, the **Number 300** dial type wheel contains not only capital letters and figures (as do the previously described **Simplex** typewriters) but small letters and additional symbols as well. Characters on the **Number 300** type wheel are arranged in the following order: "CJPFUBLWTHEROIANDGSKYMQVXZ-?.,cjpfublwtheroiandgskym—qvxz$1234567890&."

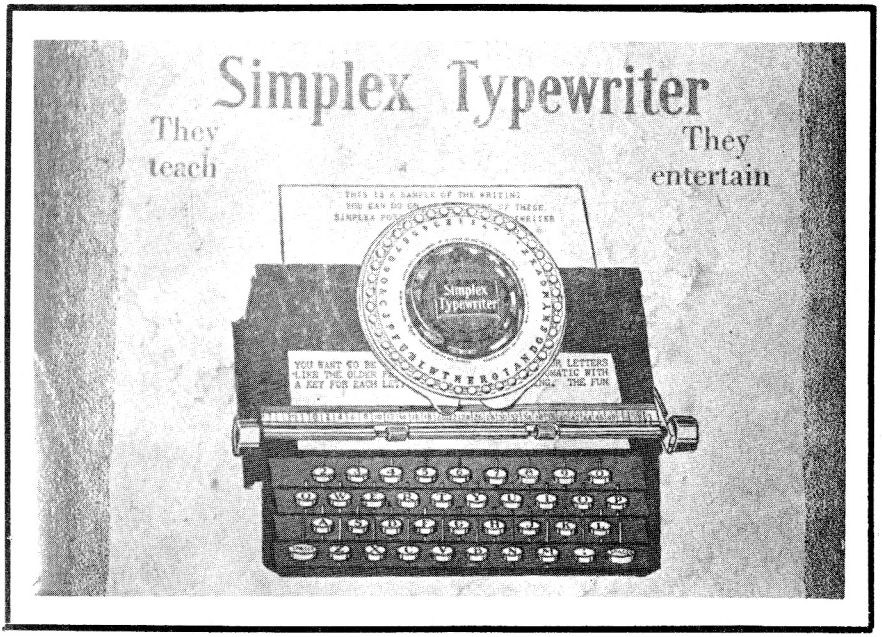
A bottle of ink was included with each **Simplex** typewriter. The bottle which accompanied the **Number 300** is shown in Photograph Number 23. The original packing box is shown in Photograph Number 24. A close-up of the lid is shown in Photograph Number 25.



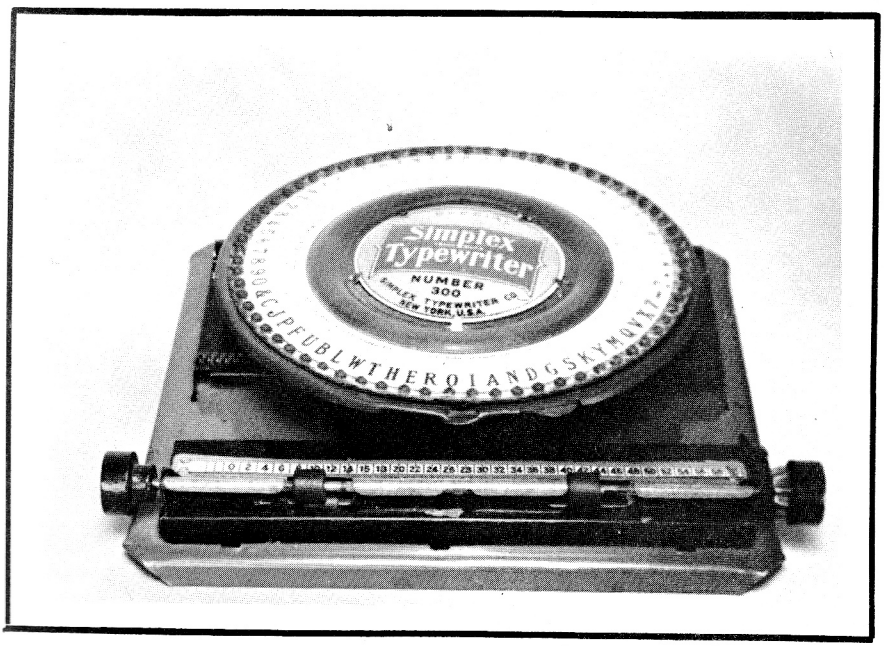
Photograph Number 23. The *Practical Simplex Typewriter Number 300*. Note the bottle of typewriter ink that came with the typewriter.



Photograph Number 24. Original packing box for the *Practical Simplex Number 300* shown in Photograph Number 23.



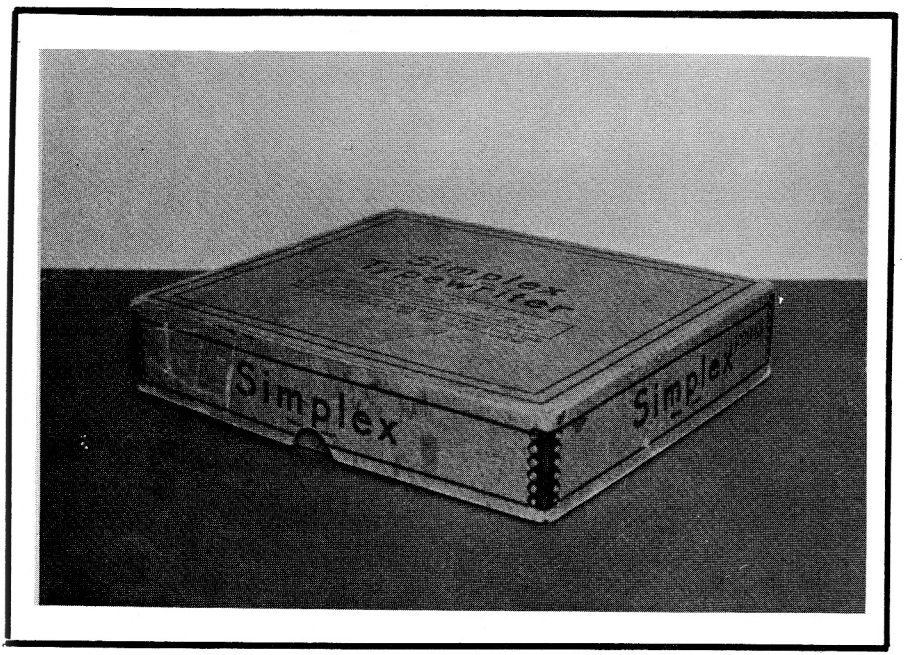
Photograph Number 25. Close-up of the lid of the packing box shown in Photograph Number 24. Note the *Simplex* slogan, "They teach . . . They entertain."



Photograph Number 26. The *Special Simplex Typewriter Number 300.*

Special Simplex Typewriter Number 300

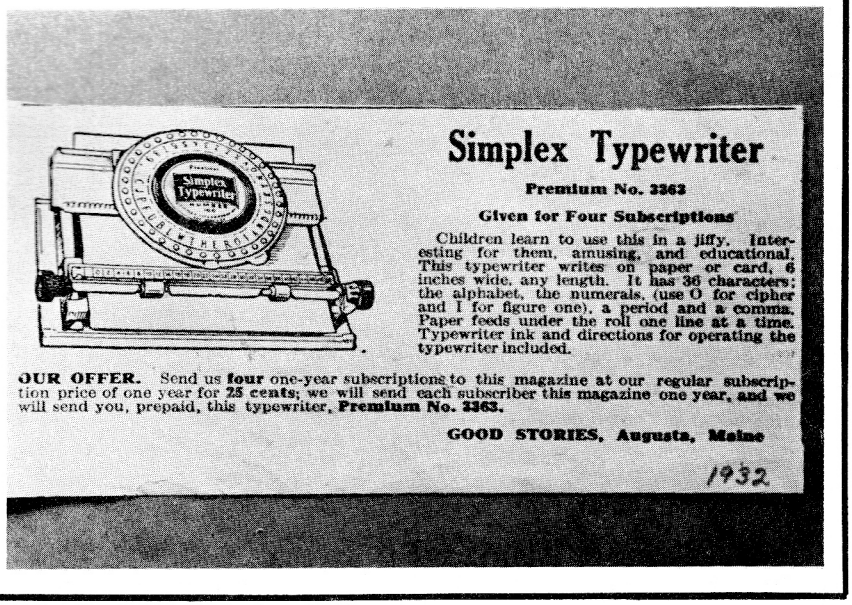
Photograph Number 26 features a **Special Simplex Typewriter Number 300.** Like the **Practical Simplex Typewriter Number 300**, this machine has a dial type wheel which contains both capital and small letters in addition to numbers and symbols. The machine is constructed of sturdy metal. Its base is finished in red and black enamel while the type wheel is finished in red, green, cream, and black. The packing box for this typewriter is shown in Photograph Number 27.



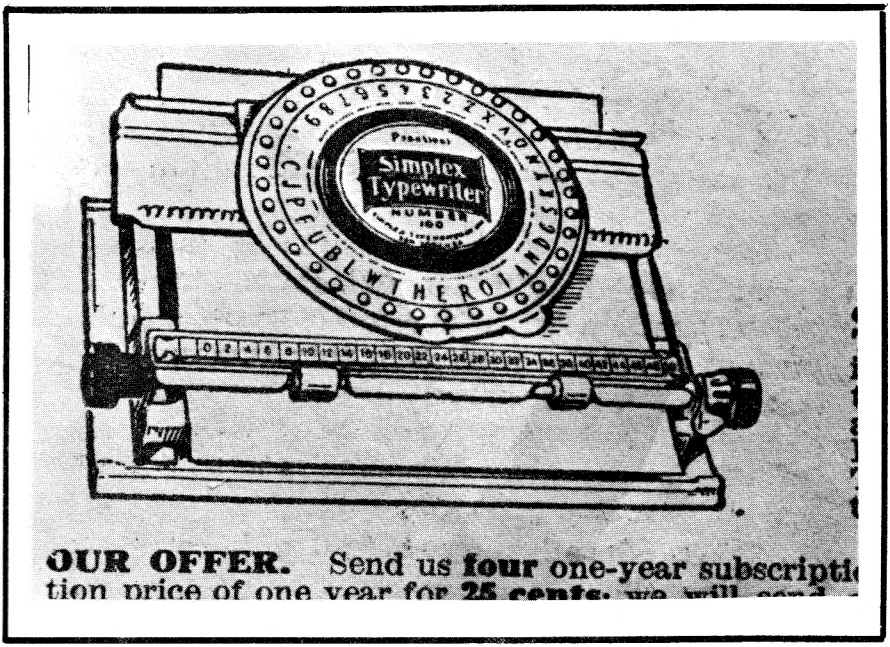
***Photograph Number 27. Original packing box for the Special Simplex Typewriter Number 300* shown in Photograph Number 26.**

Simplex Typewriters as Premiums

Simplex typewriters were offered as premiums for selling magazine subscriptions as indicated by an advertisement in a 1932 issue of **Good Stories**. This advertisement is reproduced in Photograph Number 28, and a close-up of the typewriter offered is shown in Photograph Number 29. The pictured typewriter appears similar to the small **Simplex** typewriter featured in Photograph Number 17.


Simplex Typewriter
Premium No. 2362
Given for Four Subscriptions
Children learn to use this in a jiffy. Interesting for them, amusing, and educational. This typewriter writes on paper or card, 6 inches wide, any length. It has 36 characters; the alphabet, the numerals, (use O for cipher and I for figure one), a period and a comma. Paper feeds under the roll one line at a time. Typewriter ink and directions for operating the typewriter included.
OUR OFFER. Send us four one-year subscriptions to this magazine at our regular subscription price of one year for 25 cents; we will send each subscriber this magazine one year, and we will send you, prepaid, this typewriter, Premium No. 2362.
GOOD STORIES, Augusta, Maine
1932

Photograph Number 28. Advertisement including a *Simplex* typewriter offered as a premium for selling magazine subscriptions. Reproduced from a 1932 issue of *Good Stories*.



Photograph Number 29. Close-up of the *Simplex* typewriter shown in the advertisement reproduced in Photograph Number 27.

In Summary

Nine different **Simplex** typewriters are featured in this publication as are the patents which describe them. Original packing boxes for these machines also have been described. Other **Simplex** typewriter models, using similar mechanisms, were produced during the early 1900s but are not featured here. As children's typewriters, the **Simplex** machines were designed both to "teach" and "entertain." Yesterday's children's typewriters have now become today's collectibles and continue to delight the adults who collect them.

Current Values of *Simplex* Typewriters

As the popularity of collecting **Simplex** typewriters grows, there is increasing interest in establishing a value guide to these machines. This is difficult to do since relatively few **Simplex** typewriters are offered for sale. Some general guidelines based on observed asking prices for **Simplex** typewriters are included.

The value of **Simplex** typewriters, as with almost all collectibles, is based on two factors, demand and condition. Those that are in excellent, like-new condition, accompanied with the original packing box and bottle of ink, will be desired more by collectors and therefore command higher prices. While it is difficult to determine the number of various models of **Simplex** typewriters which have survived, it appears that some of the early models are more scarce than others.

Recent mail-order advertising and flea market asking prices have ranged upward from a low of approximately $10 for the more common **Simplex** typewriters which are complete but feature poor paint, minimum damage, or minimum rust to around $40 for those in excellent condition. An original packing box and ink bottle in good condition accompanying the typewriter usually add several dollars to the asking price. Some of the less common, early-model **Simplex** typewriters usually bring higher prices. **Simplex** typewriters similar to the ones featured in this booklet range in general value from approximately $10 to $50 depending on their condition.

References

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Merrill, Peter. "Typewriter." *The Encyclopedia Americana, International Edition,* Vol. 27, 1980, pp. 320-322.

Robinson, Patrick. *The Book of Firsts.* New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1975.